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48 .Expectations of Field Supervisors in Kenya: Implications for Community-based Human Service Practicums

Opportunities for undergraduate students Developing disciplinary

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Abstract

There are also many benefits arising from this form of learning for universities. Community-based learning experiences can help improve the image of universities among professionals and the public (Mgaya & Mbekomize 2014). One of the major benefits to universities is in strengthening linkages with host organisations, which may lead to the identification of new research opportunities and funding (Paul 2009). Universities may use CBL programs to market their courses and their graduates, which may lead to sustained or improved admission of students and employability of their graduates (Cooper & Orrell n.d.). Inclusion of CBL opportunities in higher education programs is important because it contributes to the development of professional competencies that may not be fostered in traditional classroom settings. This enables academic programs to respond to and meet the emerging job market needs of their respective programs, and thus enhance employability of their graduates, since they gain practical transferrable skills that employers look for (Haneef, Yusof & Amin 2006).

Keywords*: education, respective programs, transferrable skills*

Introduction

One of the chief responsibilities of institutions of higher learning is providing students with appropriate disciplinary knowledge, skills and experiences that prepare them to tackle the multitude of issues they will encounter when they enter the workforce. Attention to the role of universities in preparing youth for the workforce has intensified in recent years, especially in African countries where there has been exponential growth in university enrolment and concerns raised about the quality of education students are receiving (Gudo, Olel & Oanda 2011;Nyangau 2014; Odhiambo 2014; Waruru 2015). Community-based learning (CBL) experiences such as service-learning, practicums and internship opportunities for undergraduate students are increasingly becoming an integral component of African higher education

(Dorasamy & Pillay 2010; Ferguson & Smith 2012). While there are many variations in how CBL is defined, there is broad consensus that this form of learning involves relevant and meaningful service activities in community settings to assist students in integrating their academic knowledge with practice in the field, providing them with opportunities to reflect critically on their learning and achieve academic, personal and civic learning objectives (Clayton, Bringle & Hatcher 2013).

Almost two decades ago, Cruz and Giles (2000) noted the paucity of research examining the concerns of community partner organisations and staff. While inroads have been made, this perspective continues to be underrepresented in the literature, with the partnership landscape in Kenya still uncharted. The aim of this study is to describe the issues faced by field supervisors of undergraduate practicum students. These field supervisors are employed by community organisations providing human services in Kenya. With a deeper understanding of the issues and concerns of field supervisors, steps can be taken to address issues and, where possible, remedy concerns.

The value of CBL experiences for university undergraduate students, the university and the host organisation is well-documented in research conducted in the North American context (Astin, Sax & Avalos 1999; Kuh 2008; Peters 2014; Zlotkowski 1998). Benefits for students can be grouped into four broad categories of educational, social, civic, and vocational/professional (e.g. Astin, Sax & Avalos 1999; Batchelder & Root 1994; Cantor 1995; Giles & Eyler 1994; Steinke & Buresh 2002; Tiessen & Heron 2012).

Thus, it is not surprising that there is an increasing focus on developing and expanding CBL programs. This growth places great pressure on programs, especially those that provide experiential or work-integrated learning experiences to bridge the gap between academia and students' chosen careers (Oanda & Jowi 2012; Owuor 2007).

The participating host organisations gain access to an unpaid or partially compensated labour force who have a wealth of contemporary theoretical knowledge and are keen to apply such knowledge (Mgaya & Mbekomize 2014). Bridging the gap between academic programs and the needs of the job market can be supported through a range of well-designed CBL experiences such as practicums; however, our knowledge of what students and community organisations need in order to improve CBL experiences for all stakeholders has not kept pace (Gower & Mulvaney 2012; Teichler 2011).

Community-based Learning in a Kenyan Context

Higher education in Kenya has been undergoing rapid and dynamic change as efforts have been made to align learning programs with national development priorities stipulated in policy documents, such as Kenya Vision 2030 (Odhiambo 2014; Republic of Kenya 2007). According to the Kenya Vision 2030 Second Medium Term Plan, the government will focus on matching education and training with the demand for skills required in the workplace (Republic of Kenya 2013). Relevant objectives for universities included in this nationwide initiative relate to the need to incorporate CBL for all students in higher education to enable them to acquire necessary on-the-job training skills before graduation.

Graduates from programs, such as Family and Community Sciences and related human services disciplines, face many challenges as employees with a broad range of human services organisations and government departments strive to address contemporary social and economic problems in communities throughout the country. Community-based learning experiences are especially vital for students enrolled in these types of programs in developing countries, such as Kenya, due to huge disparities in income, education and gender equity.

The power of CBL is enhanced when supported by best practices; however, evidence to enhance current practice is much less abundant in the African context than in North America. There are several examples of research studies examining community-based learning in the African context (Dorasamy & Pillay 2010; Linda, Mtshali &

Engelbrecht 2013; Naidoo & Devnarain 2009; Roos et al. 2005; Thomson et al. 2011), while others have conducted comparative studies of North American and Africanised models of CBL (Hatcher & Erasmus 2008; Stanton & Erasmus 2013). Using the educational philosophies of Dewey (North America) and Nyerere (Africa) to better understand these models, Hatcher and Erasmus (2008) reported that both systems expected CBL experiences to be transformative, enabling students to understand and relate to their real-world learning experiences in ways that would generate positive change for communities. Other South African studies emphasised that students in African higher education institutions needed more CBL opportunities to become professionally confident and competent, and be able to make deeper connections between their theoretical knowledge and professional skills through their CBL activities in the community (Dorasamy & Pillay 2010; Roos et al. 2005). Studies have also noted that understanding the CBL context plays a significant role in students' engagement and learning and in students gaining meaningful and productive experience (Alexander & Khabanyane 2013; Bheekie & van Huyssteen 2015; Bringle & Hatcher 2007). Similar findings have been observed with regard to the quality of CBL learning and longer term goals of community engagement (Linda, Mtshali & Engelbrecht 2013; Mahlomaholo & Matobako 2006; Osman & Castle 2006).

While there is a growing body of literature examining service-learning in South Africa, few studies have been conducted in Kenya. Opiyo-Newa (2012) conducted an assessment of internships and CBL programs at one university and found that students had positive attitudes towards CBL opportunities, but their writing and research skills needed improvement in order to achieve their learning outcomes. In an assessment of the Students' Community

Service Program at their institution, Tumuti et al. (2013) found that two-week CBL experiences allowed students to develop a variety of skills valued by Kenyan employers, such as communication and interpersonal skills, learning and problem-solving, and self-development skills. They note the benefits of this program in countering criticism of the Kenyan educational system for alienating students from the lived realities of their communities resulting from its preoccupation with testing, training for white-collar employment and focus on globalisation at the expense of local needs. Finally, in a project related to this current study, challenges encountered by field supervisors were identified and used to inform the development of a new course to prepare students for CBL experiences (Kathuri-Ogola et al. 2015; VanLeeuwen et al. 2018). These challenges included helping Kenyan students to develop reflective practice skills, articulating CBL learning goals, preparing students for demanding situations and workplaces, facilitating students' development in interpersonal communication, and a lack of understanding of students' field experiences. Thus, it is recognised that CBL is very desirable within the Kenyan context, and the implementation of these programs is key to their success for the various stakeholders.

Implementing Community-Based

In this section, we first highlight and discuss several key findings from our study and identify several recommendations based on our findings. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

From a holistic examination of our results, we came to the realisation that many of the relationships examined in this project align with Enos and Morton's (2003) transactional relationships since they operate within existing structures in which partners come together because each has something that the other perceives as useful. The CBL

relationships in this instance could be characterised as instrumental, with limited commitments and minimum disruption of the regular work of the organisation.

Our findings indicated that there were reciprocal benefits for the students and the organisations, such as students utilising their knowledge to contribute to program development in the organisations. It is important that organisations hosting CBL students understand that benefits to the organisations can result when students are given the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge (Mgaya & Mbekomize 2014), in addition to students gaining important applied professional experience (Astin, Sax & Avalos 1999; Giles & Eyler 1994).

One challenge identified that could limit the benefit of the CBL experience was that the field supervisors often had very little or no prior notification that they would be supervising a practicum student, resulting in a lack of adequate preparation to host the student. In addition, limited resources meant that many host organisations did not have orientation programs or a supportive infrastructure for student practicum activities. Faced with these situations, the field supervisors assigned tasks and duties randomly with little or no regard to the students' ability or learning goals. Such mismatched activities would certainly contribute to restricted learning (Olson & Montgomery 2000). However, an interesting finding was that, in some cases, this lack of planned activities for students on practicum enhanced creativity and innovativeness. This is an example of the resilience of some students who have the ability to both gain important knowledge and skills and contribute to the host organisation even when little or no planning or preparation has been made for their practicum experience within the host organisation. This experience during CBL can contribute to students gaining transformative real-world learning experiences (Hatcher & Erasmus 2008), especially in a country such as Kenya in which organisations have few resources to devote to planning or preparation for student learning experiences.

A key finding of this study is that we identified a lack of clarity around practicum expectations for most of the field supervisors interviewed. This was attributed to insufficient communication between the university and the host organisation and, at times, within the host organisation itself. This is a salient finding as poor communication can hinder collaborative relationships between practicum host organisations and universities (Bringle & Clayton 2013; Kathuri-Ogola et al. 2015; Sandy & Holland 2006). The field supervisors observed that there were weak or no formal structured linkages between their organisations and the university. This made it difficult for them to understand the student's learning goals, which resulted in wasting valuable time for practicum learning. This was made worse by poor orientation within the host organisation and between the host organisation and the university. These findings are particularly problematic if universities want to develop and maintain positive relationships with organisations and improve their image in the community (Mgaya & Mbekomize 2014). Other researchers have found that universities are perceived as taking resources from organisations, resulting in few benefits to the community (Nichols et al. 2013). It is clear that greater effort by universities is needed to develop stronger linkages with community organisations to ensure the sustainability and long-term success of these partnerships (Janke 2013). It is also clear that greater effort needs to be made to communicate and clarify expectations for field supervisors. Providing opportunities for field supervisors to be involved in both planning and implementing CBL could greatly contribute to improving clarity of practicum expectations and to greater engagement and benefits for the organisations (Miron & Moely 2006).

The community-based program included in this study is a relatively new program of study in Kenya and many field supervisors were not familiar with its content and structure. This resulted in the field supervisors having inconsistent expectations of the students' abilities. As a result, there were delays in assigning tasks and identifying op-

portunities that would contribute to students' learning objectives. This lack of awareness is understandable since, in Kenya, the human resource structure of most organisations is designed along the lines of traditional disciplines such as sociology, psychology, social work, political science, and development studies. However, the multifaceted nature of contemporary social problems requires both traditional and emerging disciplines to work towards systematic and sustainable solutions. Thus, in developing countries, such as Kenya, this means working towards ensuring that academic disciplines prepare graduates for the workplace (Republic of Kenya 2013).

The field supervisors had little or no understanding of the course structure and the centrality of the practicum in the fulfilment of its objectives. This led to delays in submission of the essential reporting materials and gaps in some key areas of student assessment. It was not surprising that some supervisors mentioned that the reporting format was both unclear and tedious. This was perhaps exacerbated by their viewing the task as additional to their normal workload yet not attracting commensurate compensation. The capacity of university faculty and staff to understand the perspective of the community partner has been identified as one of the top determinants of an effective relationship (Sandy & Holland 2006), so work is needed to address field supervisors' concerns associated with these administrative and assessment tasks.

Our results indicate that benefits could result from incorporating a pre-practicum experience in the curriculum. Enhanced preparation for the practicum experience could positively impact students' learning experience during practicum, thereby supporting national and United Nations efforts to promote quality education as leading to employment in developing countries, including Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2007). From our research in Kenya, we suggest that

the following should be incorporated in the program in preparation for the practicum experience: support for the development of reflective practice; articulation of practicum expectations; mental preparation for demanding situations; and enhanced interpersonal communication skills (VanLeeuwen et al. 2018). This pre-practicum preparation could take a number of forms, such as integration of brief CBL experiences into coursework prior to the practicum experience. For example, students could be required to complete volunteer work as part of the requirements of the program. This would create continuity in the learning process and exposure to community-based projects. Alternatively, it could be achieved through a series of guest speakers from relevant institutions or organisations serving various populations, or talks by members of the community. This could create partnership opportunities with host organisations and contribute to the role of staff in community organisations as co-educators (Leiderman et al. 2002).

Based on our findings, the practicum experience could be enhanced in five ways. (1) Holding structured and regular faculty–field supervisor consultative meetings could help to harmonise everyone's expectations of the practicum experience and the role that field supervisors have in the development of a learning contract. (2) Organising a tripartite orientation program, including students, field supervisors and faculty, to identify the opportunities, challenges and potential solutions to the challenges. This would entail involvement of the stakeholders in the development of orientation materials, which could be made available on the departmental website to reduce the cost of printing and updating material as knowledge evolves or the program curriculum changes. (3) Using standardised documentation to record challenges and report successes that address concerns raised by community partners. (4) Developing long-

term reciprocal partnerships between the university and host organisations. This would help to ensure that students gain required practical experience and further develop new skills that could lead to transformational learning and students being adequately prepared to work in a changing social, economic and political landscape. This form of arrangement would allow the host organisations to plan ahead for the arrival of students, and ensure that they receive adequate supervisory direction and support as well as access to the necessary physical and financial resources to follow through on their learning activities. In addition, this would allow community organisations to allocate time for student mentoring as part of the supervisors' workload, while making sure that essential work tasks were completed. (5) Supporting greater interaction between students, faculty and field supervisors in the development of student learning contracts. This would ensure that the student's goals and objectives for their practicum experience correspond with those of the host organisation's program and the designated field supervisor.

We identified several limitations of this study. The study was limited to one academic program of one university in Kenya, and the results may not be applicable to diverse academic programs in other countries. The department was relatively new, established seven years prior to the study in a nontraditional discipline. Results from a more established academic program may yield different results. Also, the responses were limited to the views of one field supervisor per organisation even in cases where the students had more than one point of supervision. The views of field supervisors willing to participate in this study may differ from those of other field supervisors.

The results of this study led to our identifying several topics for future research. It would be useful to conduct a more detailed examination of the role of the field supervisor in facilitating the development of students' professional knowledge and skill. Research that focuses on what field supervisors expect and how to effectively communicate this to students prior to the practicum would also be beneficial. Further exploration of the effectiveness of learning contracts in communicating student learning expectations to their field supervisor would be useful in the further development of community-based practicums, as well as research on the role of student reflections during and after the practicum. This could help to clarify their prior expectations and their learning during the practicum, with regard to professional commitment and the development of professional identity as a new human services professional.

Conclusions

This study increases the knowledge base of CBL in the form of practicums in the Kenyan context. CBL is one way that higher education in Kenya can enhance the employability of graduates from Kenyan university programs and respond to and meet emerging labour market needs. Evidence from this study to support the development of best practices responsive to a local context fills a critical gap and encourages key stakeholders in their efforts to move forward with innovative approaches to identified challenges. Based on this study, it is clear that further efforts need to be made to ensure that field supervisors who are staff in community organisations that host students for CBL experiences, such as practicums, have opportunities to be involved in the planning of this type of CBL. This involvement will also help ensure that field supervisors have clear expectations of students' activities as they relate to their program of study and their own role in supervising students. Recommendations to improve relationships and partnerships are crucial to ensuring positive outcomes for both students and host organisations in the future.

While there is a growing body of literature examining service-learning in South Africa, few studies have been conducted in Kenya. Opiyo-Newa (2012) conducted an assessment of internships and CBL programs at one university and found that students had positive attitudes towards CBL opportunities, but their writing and research skills needed improvement in order to achieve their learning outcomes. In an

assessment of the Students' Community Service Program at their institution, Tumuti et al. (2013) found that two-week CBL experiences allowed students to develop a variety of skills valued by Kenyan employers, such as communication and interpersonal skills, learning and problem-solving, and self-development skills. They note the benefits of this program in countering criticism of the Kenyan educational system for alienating students from the lived realities of their communities resulting from its preoccupation with testing, training for white-collar employment and focus on globalisation at the expense of local needs. Finally, in a project related to this current study, challenges encountered by field supervisors were identified and used to inform the development of a new course to prepare students for CBL experiences (Kathuri-Ogola et al. 2015; VanLeeuwen et al. 2018). These challenges included helping Kenyan students to develop reflective practice skills, articulating CBL learning goals, preparing students for demanding situations and workplaces, facilitating students' development in interpersonal communication, and a lack of understanding of students' field experiences. Thus, it is recognised that CBL is very desirable within the Kenyan context, and the implementation of these programs is key to their success for the various stakeholders.

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Methods

The community-based program at the university in Nairobi focuses on preparing graduates to deliver social services to individuals, families and communities. Emphasis is on the improvement of the welfare of people through community-based programs, which requires a thorough understanding of family and community dynamics. In order to prepare students effectively for these tasks, undergraduate students undertaking this program complete a mandatory 12-week block community-based practicum at the end of their third year of study. The practicum is a structured work experience in a professional setting, during which the student applies and acquires disciplinary and work-related knowledge and skills. As such, the practicum builds upon a student's coursework in the program as well as links theory with practical application. Each student is supervised by a field supervisor, who is an employee of the host organisation and oversees the student's day-to-day work. In addition, each student is assigned a member of the university faculty who provides support and evaluates the student. The students are usually attached to community programs serving children, youth, women, men, families, or groups with special needs. Generally the focus is on professional human service at the community level.

Fifteen organisations that hosted third-year practicum students during the May–August 2013 practicum session were sampled using purposive maximum variation sampling (Patton 2015). These organisations were situated in both urban and rural locations and had male and female field supervisors. Invitations for field supervisors to participate in the research were issued through telephone calls by the research team.

One field supervisor in each organisation participated in a face-to-face interview with a member of the research team. The interview included questions about field supervisors' understanding of the department's expectations of student learning activities during the practicum, knowledge about the academic preparation of students in the program of study and challenges associated with the supervisory role. Each participant was invited to share any further suggestions they had, that the university could consider to enhance the academic preparation of students for their practicum. Ethical approval for the research was obtained prior to participant recruitment from

the Research Ethics Boards at the Kenyan university and the Canadian university where the investigators were employed at the time of data collection.

Qualitative data from the interviews with field supervisors was analysed using thematic analysis. An inductive six-step thematic analysis process was used to analyse the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke 2006). This included steps of becoming familiar with the data, identifying initial themes, compiling a list of themes and subthemes, organising the themes and subthemes into a coding tree, naming and defining each theme, and providing a narrative description of the content of each subtheme and illustrating them by selecting representative quotes. NVivo10 software was used to aid in organising the qualitative data. Since three researchers were involved in coding data, appropriate procedures to ensure consensus were used (Marshall 2011). These included collectively developing and defining the themes that emerged from the data. Then, two researchers independently coded the data, and then three researchers worked together to come to a consensus on the codes assigned to the data.

Results

A total of 15 field supervisors participated in the study. The field supervisors included six men and nine women. Fourteen of the field supervisors were drawn from non-governmental development agencies and one from a government department. The two overarching themes used to organise the data focused on those field supervisors who had clear expectations of the student practicum experience, and those who had unclear expectations of the student practicum experience.

Clear Expectations

Six field supervisors exhibited some level of understanding of the expectations of their role in working with practicum students. The main contributors to this clear understanding of supervision expectations were: explanations provided by the students about their curriculum at the university and supervisors' work-related experience. For one supervisor, this resulted from personal experience rather than through prior interaction with the institutions of higher learning.

For me I understood because of my experience and exposure… I do resource mobilization and have had international exposure… with that experience I understood (FS13).

Another supervisor reported:

…when I told him [student] to give me the units he has covered [at university],…it gave me some ideas of what kind of support he really needs to be given… (FS10).

Unclear Expectations

Nine field supervisors indicated unclear expectations of the students' practicum experience. The two themes in which field supervisors experienced unclear expectations focused on: (1) student abilities, learning goals, and their contributions to the host organisations, and (2) the student's academic program of study and level and form of academic support by the university to supervisors.

UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS ABOUT STUDENT ABILITIES, LEARNING GOALS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Unclear expectations about student abilities emerged as a challenge. Most of the field supervisors interviewed indicated that they did not know what students were capable of, and it often took a long period of time to identify appropriate activities to assign to the students. A lack of understanding of the students' abilities resulted in unrealistically high expectations of students by their respective field supervisors. For example, some field supervisors assumed that the students would do day-to-day work activities without structured orientation and guidance.

Basically, the challenges of supervision come during the initial stages because first of all they [students] are new, it is their first time… and they are yet to internalize the project purpose and activities. Even after this, the first 2 to 3 weeks, they get a lot of difficulties (FS8).

Notably, some field supervisors were not clear about what the learning goals of the students were so that the organisation

could provide the necessary learning experiences.

At first I did not know because I told them that I felt they [students] were in the wrong place. Because yours [program] is Community Resource Management and we have no resources that we can manage at the District alone... I felt that they will not be able to learn or fit and get the required experience. But they have managed (FS7).

In some cases, the field supervisors indicated ways in which the students were able to make contributions to the host organisation, although they did not always have an expectation that this would be an outcome of the practicum. An interesting opportunity for creativity and innovation emerged for students who were placed in an environment in which there were no clear expectations of them. This was demonstrated in the flexibility and participatory approach adopted by some host organisations – they included the students in identifying the relevant activities and program they wished to be involved with.

We allow them to come up with an idea... or a program... we become open so they can come up with the ideas (FS6).

Students were also given the opportunity to be creative in defining their own experiences due to lack of expectations.

Some students come up with a write up of what they are supposed to do... so we come up with a timetable... so the interns program themselves (FS14).

UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR SUPERVISORS

Field supervisors provided many examples of having unclear expectations about the academic program and the level and form of academic support provided to them and their organisations.

Now if maybe you can now plan on giving us the curriculum to understand or a short timetable to show what they normally do... (FS15).

Some field supervisors did not understand the course structure and the expected format for reporting on the progress of the students. This was highlighted by one of the field supervisors:

Basically if you have trainings, it can help us know in depth, what course they are taking and what kind of activities we need to engage them in because when they come here what we do is try to fit them into our system, but also I can't tell at the end of the day if it is working towards achieving the objective of the department (FS8).

To enhance their understanding of the practicum expectations, the field supervisors proposed improvement to and standardisation of documentation provided to the host organisation.

Normally, they [students] are supposed to come with documents indicating objectives... a form where they have their objectives so that when I am with them I can be able to know what they are to achieve at the end of the practicum (FS4).

Several field supervisors indicated that they expected the provision of an orientation program.

I had no idea what was expected from the students... because they were just brought to me to supervise them (FS2).

An orientation program could contribute greatly to a long-term and successful relationship between the host organisation and the academic program.

We need to first of all start a relationship with the institution and the department so that we are able to get clear information on expectations of the department and expectations of the students... so we are able to help them achieve the department's expectations and at the end of the day, we as an organisation achieve what we want from them and also help the students achieve some of their expectations (FS8).

Further, supervisors suggested that more interaction between field supervisors

and faculty members was needed before the practicum began.

You should call for a short 2 or 3 day induction for your supervisors so that when you send your students then you know they are in the right hands... because if a supervisor misinterprets the expectations then they may not be able to guide the students (FS13).

The field supervisors highlighted the importance of prior interaction with university faculty to harmonise expectations of the entire practicum placement.

When I started supervising them [students], I felt I should have met their lecturer before assigning duties to them (FS3).

In addition to more knowledge about the academic requirements and an orientation program, the field supervisors expected practicums to be coordinated to a greater extent. In some instances, there was random placement of students without matching their skills with appropriate activities within the host organisation. One field supervisor indicated:

If you know the students' area of specialization one would be able to place them in the appropriate department and allocate a relevant activity. ... but if you don't have a wider knowledge of what a student expects from the attachment you may assume and leave some things out which may be very important to the student (FS3).

In other cases, students were deployed to departments within the host organizations without clear terms of reference. In addition, the host organisations sometimes did not have adequate time to prepare to host students.

If we are informed before they come at least we can prepare a job description... Otherwise, if they just come without adequate prior notice, we will only allocate to them the most pressing job like filing which may not provide an avenue for adequate learning (FS4).

Discussion

In this section, we first highlight and discuss several key findings from our study and identify several recommendations based on our findings. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

From a holistic examination of our results, we came to the realisation that many of the relationships examined in this project align with Enos and Morton's (2003) transactional relationships since they operate within existing structures in which partners come together because each has something that the other perceives as useful. The CBL relationships in this instance could be characterised as instrumental, with limited commitments and minimum disruption of the regular work of the organisation.

Our findings indicated that there were reciprocal benefits for the students and the organisations, such as students utilising their knowledge to contribute to program development in the organisations. It is important that organisations hosting CBL students understand that benefits to the organisations can result when students are given the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge (Mgaya & Mbekomize 2014), in addition to students gaining important applied professional experience (Astin, Sax & Avalos 1999; Giles & Eyler 1994).

One challenge identified that could limit the benefit of the CBL experience was that the field supervisors often had very little or no prior notification that they would be supervising a practicum student, resulting in a lack of adequate preparation to host the student. In addition, limited resources meant that many host organisations did not have orientation programs or a supportive infrastructure for student practicum activities. Faced with these situations, the field supervisors assigned tasks and duties randomly with little or no regard to the students' ability or learning goals. Such mismatched activities would certainly contribute to restricted learning (Olson & Montgomery 2000). However, an interesting finding was that, in some cases, this lack of planned activities for students on practicum enhanced creativity and innovativeness. This is an example of the resilience of some students who have the ability to both gain important knowledge and skills and contribute to the host organisation even when little or no planning or preparation has been

made for their practicum experience within the host organisation. This experience during CBL can contribute to students gaining transformative real-world learning experiences (Hatcher & Erasmus 2008), especially in a country such as Kenya in which organisations have few resources to devote to planning or preparation for student learning experiences.

A key finding of this study is that we identified a lack of clarity around practicum expectations for most of the field supervisors interviewed. This was attributed to insufficient communication between the university and the host organisation and, at times, within the host organisation itself. This is a salient finding as poor communication can hinder collaborative relationships between practicum host organisations and universities (Bringle & Clayton 2013; Kathuri-Ogola et al. 2015; Sandy & Holland 2006). The field supervisors observed that there were weak or no formal structured linkages between their organisations and the university. This made it difficult for them to understand the student's learning goals, which resulted in wasting valuable time for practicum learning. This was made worse by poor orientation within the host organisation and between the host organisation and the university. These findings are particularly problematic if universities want to develop and maintain positive relationships with organisations and improve their image in the community (Mgaya & Mbekomize 2014). Other researchers have found that universities are perceived as taking resources from organisations, resulting in few benefits to the community (Nichols et al. 2013). It is clear that greater effort by universities is needed to develop stronger linkages with community organisations to ensure the sustainability and long-term success of these partnerships (Janke 2013). It is also clear that greater effort needs to be made to communicate and clarify expectations for field supervisors.

Providing opportunities for field supervisors to be involved in both planning and implementing CBL could greatly contribute to improving clarity of practicum expectations and to greater engagement and benefits for the organisations (Miron & Moely 2006).

The community-based program included in this study is a relatively new program of study in Kenya and many field supervisors were not familiar with its content and structure. This resulted in the field supervisors having inconsistent expectations of the students' abilities. As a result, there were delays in assigning tasks and identifying opportunities that would contribute to students' learning objectives. This lack of awareness is understandable since, in Kenya, the human resource structure of most organisations is designed along the lines of traditional disciplines such as sociology, psychology, social work, political science, and development studies. However, the multifaceted nature of contemporary social problems requires both traditional and emerging disciplines to work towards systematic and sustainable solutions. Thus, in developing countries, such as Kenya, this means working towards ensuring that academic disciplines prepare graduates for the workplace (Republic of Kenya 2013).

The field supervisors had little or no understanding of the course structure and the centrality of the practicum in the fulfilment of its objectives. This led to delays in submission of the essential reporting materials and gaps in some key areas of student assessment. It was not surprising that some supervisors mentioned that the reporting format was both unclear and tedious. This was perhaps exacerbated by their viewing the task as additional to their normal workload yet not attracting commensurate compensation. The capacity of university faculty and staff to understand the perspective of the community partner has been identified as one of the top determinants of an effective relationship (Sandy & Holland 2006), so

work is needed to address field supervisors' concerns associated with these administrative and assessment tasks.

Our results indicate that benefits could result from incorporating a pre-practicum experience in the curriculum. Enhanced preparation for the practicum experience could positively impact students' learning experience during practicum, thereby supporting national and United Nations efforts to promote quality education as leading to employment in developing countries, including Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2007). From our research in Kenya, we suggest that the following should be incorporated in the program in preparation for the practicum experience: support for the development of reflective practice; articulation of practicum expectations; mental preparation for demanding situations; and enhanced interpersonal communication skills (VanLeeuwen et al. 2018). This pre-practicum preparation could take a number of forms, such as integration of brief CBL experiences into coursework prior to the practicum experience. For example, students could be required to complete volunteer work as part of the requirements of the program. This would create continuity in the learning process and exposure to community-based projects. Alternatively, it could be achieved through a series of guest speakers from relevant institutions or organisations serving various populations, or talks by members of the community. This could create partnership opportunities with host organisations and contribute to the role of staff in community organisations as co-educators (Leiderman et al. 2002).

Based on our findings, the practicum experience could be enhanced in five ways. (1) Holding structured and regular faculty–field supervisor consultative meetings could help to harmonise everyone's expectations of the practicum experience and the role that field supervisors have in the development of a learning contract. (2) Organising a tripartite orientation program, including students, field supervisors and faculty, to identify the opportunities, challenges and potential solutions to the challenges. This would entail involvement of the stakeholders in the development of orientation materials, which could be made available on the departmental website to reduce the cost of printing and updating material as knowledge evolves or the program curriculum changes. (3) Using standardised documentation to record challenges and report successes that address concerns raised by community partners. (4) Developing long-term reciprocal partnerships between the university and host organisations. This would help to ensure that students gain required practical experience and further develop new skills that could lead to transformational learning and students being adequately prepared to work in a changing social, economic and political landscape. This form of arrangement would allow the host organisations to plan ahead for the arrival of students, and ensure that they receive adequate supervisory direction and support as well as access to the necessary physical and financial resources to follow through on their learning activities. In addition, this would allow community organisations to allocate time for student mentoring as part of the supervisors' workload, while making sure that essential work tasks were completed. (5) Supporting greater interaction between students, faculty and field supervisors in the development of student learning contracts. This would ensure that the student's goals and objectives for their practicum experience correspond with those of the host organisation's program and the designated field supervisor.

We identified several limitations of this study. The study was limited to one academic program of one university in Kenya, and the results may not be applicable to diverse academic programs in other countries. The department was relatively new, established seven years prior to the study in a non-traditional discipline. Results from a more established academic program may yield different results. Also, the responses were limited to the views of one field supervisor per organisation even in cases where the students had more than one point of supervision. The views of field supervisors willing to participate in this study may differ from those of other field supervisors.

The results of this study led to our identifying several topics for future research. It would be useful to conduct a more detailed examination of the role of the field supervisor in facilitating the development of students' professional knowledge and skill. Research that focuses on what field supervisors expect and how to effectively communicate this to students prior to the practicum would also be beneficial. Further exploration of the effectiveness of learning contracts in communicating student learning expectations to their field supervisor would be useful in the further development of community-based practicums, as well as research on the role of student reflections during and after the practicum. This could help to clarify their prior expectations and their learning during the practicum, with regard to professional commitment and the development of professional identity as a new human services professional.

Conclusions

This study increases the knowledge base of CBL in the form of practicums in the Kenyan context. CBL is one way that higher education in Kenya can enhance the employability of graduates from Kenyan university programs and respond to and meet emerging labour market needs. Evidence from this study to support the development of best practices responsive to a local context fills a critical gap and encourages key stakeholders in their efforts to move forward with innovative approaches to identified challenges. Based on this study, it is clear that further efforts need to be made to ensure that field supervisors who are staff in community organisations that host students for CBL experiences, such as practicums, have opportunities to be involved in the planning of this type of CBL. This involvement will also help ensure that field supervisors have clear expectations of students' activities as they relate to their program of study and their own role in supervising students. Recommendations to improve relationships and partnerships are crucial to ensuring positive outcomes for both students and host organisations in the future. The results from this study can be used to inform the development of CBL opportunities in other universities and other human service disciplines, which is essential to producing a skilled workforce in Kenya and other developing countries.

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